



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

5 November 2004

### RUS43106.E

Russia: Anti-Semitism and the government's reaction to it (January 2002 - October 2004)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Between January 2002 and September 2004, there were between six hundred thousand and one million Jews in Russia, of which eighty per cent resided in Moscow and St. Petersburg (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. I; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. I; *International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. I).

#### Anti-Semitism in Russia

Anti-Semitic incidents against Jews in Russia continued throughout the period covered by this Response (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; AI 17 Apr. 2003; *FSU Monitor* 28 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 8 Feb. 2002). Such incidents included the following:

- harassment and/or assault against Jews (AI 17 Apr. 2003; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III; *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002; *ibid.* 5 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 8 Feb. 2002; *Bigotry Monitor* 24 Sept. 2004; United States Commission on International Freedom May 2003, 1);
- the posting on Russian streets of anti-Semitic signs that were rigged with explosives and were set off when individuals attempted to remove them (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002; *The New York Times* 1 June 2002; United States Commission on International Freedom May 2003, 12);
- attempted or successful attacks on synagogues (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; United States Commission on International Freedom May 2003, 12);
- synagogue vandalism (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III);
- cemetery desecration (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III; United States Commission on International Freedom May 2003, 12);
- attacks on Jewish schools (*FSU Monitor* 7 Oct. 2004);
- robbery of Jewish newspaper offices (*Interfax* 4 Aug. 2004);
- anti-Semitic graffiti (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III);
- a poetry reading in Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow, which entailed the playing of video footage of Nazis torturing and executing Jews, the sale of videotapes containing footage of Nazi party rallies, Hitler's speeches and the torture and execution of Jews during the Holocaust (*Bigotry Monitor* 1 Feb. 2002b);
- distribution of anti-Semitic local publications and/or literature (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III; *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002; *ibid.* 8 Feb. 2002; United States Commission on International Freedom May 2003, 12), and
- anti-Semitic statements made by government authorities (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002).

Throughout the period 2002 through 2004, Russian National Unity (RNE), identified by the United States Department of State as an "ultranationalist and anti-Semitic ... paramilitary organization," continued its anti-

Semitic campaign, and although it appeared to have lost most of its influence in some regions, the organization was very active in other regions such as Voronezh (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II) and the city of Nerekhta, Kostroma Oblast (*Bigotry Monitor* 1 Feb. 2002a).

According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2004*, "while the number of anti-Semitic incidents remained stable in 2003, the nature of the attacks has become more violent" (15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). According to the Israeli ambassador to Russia, "residual anti-Semitism [exists] at all levels in Russia" (ITAR-TASS 25 Oct. 2004).

## **The Government**

During a presentation on the Russian Federation at the Ninth European Country of Origin Information Seminar held in Dublin, Ireland, on 26 May 2004, a Moscow-based representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that anti-Semitism in Russia is not "state-imposed." In fact, the United States Department of State indicated that the "state-sponsored" anti-Semitism that existed during the Soviet era no longer exists in the Russian Federation (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. III).

In 2001, the Russian government implemented the five-year State Program on Tolerance and Prevention of Extremism, which is intended to target racially or religiously motivated discriminatory attitudes and practices (AI 17 Apr. 2003). Information on the effect, if any, that this program may have had since its implementation could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Between 2002 and 2004, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, publicly condemned anti-Semitism, stating that it would not be tolerated in Russia (*FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002; AI 17 Apr. 2003; *The New York Times* 1 June 2002; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom May 2003). Similarly, *The Jerusalem Post* reported in October 2002 that the government had "tak[en] a firm stand against anti-Semitism" (3 Oct. 2002). Despite these remarks, during the Ninth European Country of Origin Information Seminar in Dublin, Ireland, the UNHCR representative indicated that the Russian government had "failed" to combat anti-Semitism (26 May 2004).

In a May 2003 report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom indicated that there has been little action on the part of the Russian government, particularly at the local levels, to counter anti-Semitic literature and publications (12). However, according to the United States Department of State, between early 2002 and late 2003, the Ministry of Press closed "a number" of publications for anti-Semitic content and charged others with violating Article 282 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. II). Specifically,

[i]n June 2002, the local prosecutor's office in Ulyanovsk opened a criminal case under Article 282 against the editor of the local newspaper "Orthodox Simbirsk," who ran a number of articles demonizing Jews. ... In July 2002, the Ministry of Press ordered the closure of a newspaper run by the openly anti-Semitic politician Viktor Korchagin (ibid.).

In June 2004, the Arbitration Court of Sverdlovsk Oblast ordered the anti-Semitic newspaper *Russkaya Obshchina Yekaterinburga* to be closed after the court found that the paper "violated the laws banning incitement of ethnic hatred" (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II).

## **The Law and Its Application**

The Constitution of Russia provides for a separation between religion and the state and for equal treatment of all religions before the law (IHF 17-18 July 2003, 32; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004).

Although the United States Department of State recognized that in practice the Russian Government "generally respects" the freedom of religion as enshrined in its Constitution, it also indicated that "the Government did not always respect these provisions" and that "in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on some groups" (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003; *International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002). The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) reported in July 2003 that the government showed preferential treatment to the Russian Orthodox Church (17-18 July 2003, 32).

In 1997, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations replaced the Law on the Freedom

of Religion, which had been adopted by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in 1990 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). The preamble of this federal law categorizes Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism as "'traditional religions' and recognizes the 'special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture'" (ibid.; see also IHF 17-18 July 2003, 32).

According to the IHF, provisions of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations are "unclear and contradictory" alongside of local and regional laws (ibid., 33). This lack of precision has led to the adoption of local or regional legislation, which in turn, has allowed local and regional authorities to restrict the rights and activities of religious minorities (ibid.; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). In some instances, the restrictions on the rights of unregistered religious groups have been more severe than required by the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (IHF 17-18 July 2003, 33).

Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation prohibits the incitement of national, racial or religious hatred (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002).

In July 2003, an anti-extremism bill, which "prohibits advocating in public speech the superiority of any group based on religion, race, nationality, language, or other attributes," was adopted (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). However, the law does not cover Website content that may incite hatred (ibid.).

Despite these hate crime laws, the United States Department of State reported that in 2003 and 2004, "[i]n the vast majority of crimes targeting Jewish organizations and property, officials generally ignore the anti-Semitic motivations [or components] of the crimes and prosecute criminals under the much more lenient charge of 'hooliganism'" (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. II; see also *FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002 and United States Commission on International Religious Freedom May 2003, 12). The *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* stated that according to figures provided by non-governmental organizations, during 2002, 71 cases were filed with Russian courts under Article 282 of the Criminal Code, and 32 individuals were sentenced (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003, Sec. II). However, contrasting information was published by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, which reported that between September 2000 and September 2002, only 12 individuals had been convicted under Article 282 (*FSU Monitor* 17 Sept. 2002). According to the Union, "law enforcement and the judiciary do not actively enforce this statute" (ibid.). More recent statistics on convictions under Article 282 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

## **The Police**

One news article reported that the police in Russia are slow to initiate criminal investigations of incidents of anti-Semitism (Interfax 25 Oct. 2004). Another article published by *The New York Times* reported that perpetrators of anti-Semitic attacks are not punished and receive "the quiet support of the law enforcement authorities" (1 June 2002).

Most recently, in September 2004, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews reported that Sergey Sofrin, a Jew and director of a local business in Khabarovsk, was unlawfully detained, threatened, verbally and physically assaulted, and then released by the local police (*Bigotry Monitor* 24 Sept. 2004). According to the report, there are "'hundreds' of similar cases of police abuse in the region" (ibid.). Corroborating information on police abuse of Jews could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

Amnesty International (AI). 17 April 2003. "Russian Federation: Racial Intolerance Must Be Stamped Out." (EUR 46/032/2003) <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR460322003>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

*Bigotry Monitor* [Washington]. 24 September 2004. Vol. 4, No. 34. Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. "Khabarovsk Police Abuse Jews." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com>> [Accessed 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 1 February 2002a. Vol. 2, No. 5. Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. "Neo-Nazi Group is Gaining Strength in Kostroma Oblast." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com>> [Accessed 15 Feb. 2002]

\_\_\_\_\_. 1 February 2002b. Vol. 2, No. 5. Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. "Neo-Nazis in Moscow Museum Celebrate Hitler and September 11 Attack." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com>> [Accessed 15 Feb. 2002]

*FSU Monitor* [Washington]. 28 October 2004. Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. "Russian Jewish Body Says Police Not Doing Enough to Fight Antisemitism." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com/stories/102804Russ3.shtml>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 7 October 2004. Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. "Russian Jewish School Attacked." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com/stories/100704Russia.shtml>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 5 October 2004. Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. "Son of Yoshkar-Ola Jewish Leader Stabbed Near Home." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com/stories/100504Russia.shtml>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 17 September 2002. Alexander Axelrod. Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. "New ADL Report on Antisemitism in Russia." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com>> [Accessed 20 Sept. 2002]

\_\_\_\_\_. 8 February 2002. Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. "Jewish Agency for Israel Makes Statement on Antisemitism in Russia." <<http://www.fsumonitor.com>> [Accessed 15 Feb. 2002]

Interfax. 25 October 2004. "Russian Jewish Leader Says Antisemitism Has Declined, Concerns Remain over Police." (FBIS-SOV-2004-1025 26 Oct. 2004/WNC)

\_\_\_\_\_. 4 August 2004. "International Jewish Newspaper Office in Moscow Robbed." (FBIS-SOV-2004-0804 5 Aug. 2004/WNC)

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF). 17-18 July 2003. *Problems of Religious Freedom and Tolerance in Selected OSCE States*. <[http://www.ihf-hr.org/viewbinary/viewdocument.php?doc\\_id=4723](http://www.ihf-hr.org/viewbinary/viewdocument.php?doc_id=4723)> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

*International Religious Freedom Report 2004*. 15 September 2004. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. "Russia." <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35480pf.htm>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

*International Religious Freedom Report 2003*. 18 December 2003. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. "Russia." <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/24430pf.htm>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

*International Religious Freedom Report 2002*. 7 October 2002. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. "Russia." <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13958pf.htm>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

ITAR-TASS. 25 October 2004. Yelena Dorofeyeva. "Russia's Chief Rabbi Says Jewish Organizations Enjoying 'Full Freedom'." (FBIS-SOV-2004-1025 26 Oct. 2004/WNC)

*The Jerusalem Post*. 3 October 2002. Herb Keinon. "Russian Chief Rabbi: Improved Conditions Discourage Immigration to Israel." (NEXIS)

*The New York Times*. 1 June 2002. Sabrina Tavernise. "Bomb Attack Shows That Russia Hasn't Rooted Out Anti-Semitism." (NEXIS)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 26 May 2004. Presentation on Russia, Ninth European Country of Origin Information Seminar, Dublin, Ireland.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. May 2003. *Report on the Russian Federation*. <<http://www.uscirf.gov/reports/02May03/russiaReport.pdf>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2004]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** BBC, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Global News Service of the Jewish People, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Minority Rights Group International, *The Moscow Times*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

**The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.**

